

Kansas Wesleyan University Commencement

May 8, 2010

President Lamkin, members of the board of trustees, faculty and staff, parents and graduates, thank you for the kind invitation to join you today. To the class of 2010: congratulations on your outstanding achievement.

I want to thank the moms and dads with us today who have sacrificed to make this day possible. When your son or daughter graduates from college, it's a wonderful day for your family, and a pretty good day for your bank account. If you ask these seniors who had the most influence on their lives, not one would say "my Congressman." Most likely they would say their parents. Few things in life are more important than our jobs as moms and dads. Parents, thank you for all you have done to help your sons and daughters reach this point in their lives. As your son or daughter moves on, you can take pride in knowing you have helped them take an important step forward. I know the graduates will join in thanking you for your love and support.

I also want to thank the members of the faculty. Kansas Wesleyan is fortunate to have an excellent faculty, who make an impact on students' lives forever – educators who teach not only the facts and figures, but also instill a love for learning in their students. Your decision to invest in the lives of young people is an honorable one, and I thank you for it. There is no more important, no more noble profession than teaching.

Graduates: for four years, this campus has been your life. You've studied hard, played hard and made lifelong friendships. Along the way, you may have wondered whether this day would ever come. Well, it's finally here, and my wife, Robba, and I give our heartfelt congratulations to the Class of 2010.

Addressing a class of graduating seniors is a difficult task. It's not always easy to explain the meaning of life or give you a recipe for guaranteed success. I suppose, in an attempt to make me feel better, people have told me not to worry, because "Hardly anyone will be listening and or remember what you said." I'm not sure if that was intended to be encouraging, but I guess it does make me feel a little better.

Graduates, for the next few minutes, I'd like to visit with you about the road ahead and the choices that lay before you. Your education here at KWU has undoubtedly prepared you well for your chosen career – and you are probably eager to jump into the "real world" and starting building that career. Many of you will probably go on to become successful doctors, or lawyers, or journalists or even politicians! But my question for you is whether or not you will be defined by those titles. In life, each of us has a higher calling. Not to make a dollar, but to make a difference. Not just to find happiness, but to fulfill a purpose. Success is not just achieving wealth, power or fame. Remember that no job, regardless of the salary or perks, can take the place of a life committed to a purpose greater than yourself. This nation will be no better off with one more millionaire, but will be better if one more person lives his life with integrity, committed to serving others.

What does that look like – a life committed to serving others? Well, there is no better model to point to than Jesus Christ. In teaching his disciples how they should live, Jesus said “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”

In Philippians 2:3-4, we are instructed to “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Although many in my generation have worked to make the world a better place, our country needs you and your generation to continue to make a difference.

In the last few years, we’ve heard a lot about change and how things need to change in America. The theme of the 2008 presidential election was “change.” While change did happen—we elected a new president; many Americans still seem unsatisfied and think we need even more change. But the truth is, to bring about lasting change in America, Americans themselves need to change. We are always looking for great new leaders; and while who we elect to lead our nation is important, I believe we are also in need of great servants and good citizens. Each of you graduates can make a remarkable difference in choosing how you live your life.

Back in 1886, KWU was founded by the United Methodist Church with this mission in mind: “to promote and integrate academic excellence, spiritual development, personal well-being, and

social responsibility.” I’m here to tell you that America needs more people committed to that mission. If Christians would follow our biblical instructions; if we would be changed, we would then see the change that our nation is calling for.

Making a difference in this world starts at home with loving moms and dads, strong families, committed churches and caring communities. When individuals live out their faith by serving in their neighborhoods, churches and schools, they can change lives for the better. This witness makes a far greater impact than any government program or any political election.

Let me tell you a bit about my own experience in politics. For those of you who have an interest in politics or are considering a career in public service, I commend you and encourage you to get involved. But I’ll be the first to tell you that true satisfaction in life and one’s purpose in life does not come from one’s status or power in Washington.

There is nothing in my background that would suggest that I would grow up to become a Congressman---no financial or political heritage in my family. My Dad worked in the oil fields of Western Kansas and my Mom was the lady you paid your electric bill to in my small hometown of Plainville, Kansas. I am a first generation college graduate that happened to find politics and government interesting. So I set a goal of becoming a member of the United States House of Representatives. With the help of many people, I succeeded in reaching that goal thirteen years ago. Being elected to Congress was something I really wanted and a sense of great satisfaction should have followed my election. Despite my electoral success, something was missing. When we set goals for ourselves, even when that goal is met, we are left feeling empty and unsatisfied. That’s because satisfaction in life doesn’t come with meeting goals we establish for ourselves; but instead comes from living a life in accordance with God’s will—satisfying His plan for our lives.

Proverbs 3:5-9 tells us to:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart;

Lean not on your own understanding;

In all your ways acknowledge him

And he will make your paths straight.

After the election and the excitement of being sworn-in as a member of Congress had worn off, I needed a little straightening of my paths. Fortunately, a group back in my home church was praying for me. My friends' prayers helped me come to understand that God placed in my life a great opportunity to be of service to my fellow man.

Abraham Lincoln once said "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." This statement came from a man who held the most powerful position in the United States. He knew where his ultimate help and purpose in life came from.

Graduates, remember that success comes not from the things that we accumulate, but by living a life in service to others. Remember that your purpose is to make a difference in this life. Most of my sins are not what I have done, but rather what I have failed to do. A quote I saw just this week: My fear for you in your life is not that you will fail – but that you will succeed in the things that ultimately don't really matter. Don't forget God's faithfulness to you – as the great hymn tells us:

Great is thy faithfulness

Morning by morning new mercies I see

All I have needed thy great hand hath provided

Great is thy faithfulness

Lord unto me

The world is a large and wonderful place and it is your moment to step into it. The way may be uncertain, but you are armed with your faith, the character built into you by family, and a solid education.

Our small voice tells God, "I don't know where we are going."

And God answers: "We are going forward, into the future I have shaped for you."

"But I don't know where that is"

And God answers: "I do; let's go."

"But I am afraid"

And God says: "Of course you are. Any sensible person would be. Let's go."

And we say, "But can I do all that is given me to do?"

And God says: "I have made you, I am with you to the end. Take my hand. Let's go."

So as you graduate today, may the values you learned here always guide your course. May you always follow the Lord's lead and live with a sense of deep satisfaction in knowing you are fulfilling a higher purpose.

Congratulations and best wishes to the Class of 2010. May God bless you as you live out His will for your lives.